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ABSTRACT

The collaborative innovation described in this paper, the use of cooperating teachers in instructing methods courses, is an integral part of a thorough revision of the student teaching program in secondary social studies at the University of Alberta. This innovation was the response to multiple problems with the student teaching program. Cooperating teachers were increasingly reluctant to accept student teachers: there was a lack of integration of theory and practice in the educational program: and students felt the methods course was too theoretical. It was felt that cooperating teachers should be given an extended role in the student teaching program. A program was designed to include opportunities for student teachers to come in contact with cooperating teachers in a university setting. These teachers presented specific methods that worked well for them as classroom teachers, and discussed issues and problems of importance in the teaching of their field, social studies. It was determined that such large group instruction provided meaningful involvement by cooperating teachers and allowed student teachers to learn from a large number of excellent cooperating teachers. (JD)

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"The Classroom Cooperating Teacher as University Instructor"

A Report submitted to the
National Council for the Social Studies
College and University Faculty Assembly
Ad Hoc Committee

for

Professional Outreach and Service

on

October 6, 1980

by

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The collaborative innovation described in this paper, the use of cooperating teachers in instructing methods courses, is an integral part of a thorough revision of the student teaching program in secondary social studies at the University of Alberta. It is necessary, then, to discuss this innovation in the context of the larger program changes.

Problems in the University Program

In September 1976, the University of Alberta sought to make student teaching placements for approximately 180 secondary social studies student teachers within the Edmonton Public, Edmonton Separate, and other school systems surrounding Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Only sixty-two secondary social studies teachers, however, were willing to assume responsibility for student teachers. Obviously, placing three student teachers with each cooperating teacher was not a solution and, eventually, a decision was made to cut student teacher time in the classroom in half so that all student teachers could be placed. Instead of each student teacher being placed for two 5-week/1/2 day student teaching rounds, each student teacher now only had one 5-week/1/2 day round. Thus, by placing one group of sixty student teachers in Winter Term I for a single 5-week/1/2 day session (in parts of September and October); one group of sixty student teachers in Winter Term II for a single 5-week/1/2 day session (in parts of January and February); and a third groups in a special Spring Term for a single 4-week/full day session (in May) all student teachers were placed.

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The quality of the student teaching experience suffered because the main goal became to "get people through." Those sixty cooperating teachers who had three student teachers during the 1976-1977 academic year were certainly overworked. Furthermore, the student teachers received only 1/2 of the normal time in the schools and in only one placement instead of the normal two placements. An official of the Alberta Teachers' Assocation, in addressing a group of student teachers and former student teachers in 1976, stated flatly that those students who student taught for only 5 weeks/1/2 days would suffer in the current competitive job market. Whether those student teachers, now teachers, have suffered in hiring is not known. However, common sense suggests that longer, more varied student teaching experiences would have been more beneficial in preparing future teachers for classroom realities.

Certainly, there were many reasons in 1976-1977 for the increasing lack of cooperating teacher enthusiasm in accepting the responsibility of working with a student teacher. One large problem, and the only problem on which the secondary social studies student teaching coordinator could have direct influence, was the student teaching program at the University of Alberta. The following problems were frequently mentioned or were obvious in regard to the secondary social studies student teaching program:

1) Social studies cooperating teachers increasingly refused to volunteer their services as cooperating teachers.

2) The methods course was said to be too theoretical.

3) Five weeks of 1/2 day student teaching created difficulties -- particularly in the junior high school that had flexible schedules for students.

4) Student teachers generally carried a heavy university course load in addition to student teaching.

5) There was a lack of integration of theory and practice in the education program.

6) Spring term student teaching interfered with secondary school classes at a crucial time.

7) Teachers in public and separate schools felt a lack of input into practicum decisions.

8) Student teaching was too short and too unrealistic.

9) High enrollment in secondary social studies classes forced the hiring of part-time university instructors who could not meet with students on a continuing basis.

The problems enumerated reflect in some specificity on the role of cooperating teachers. However, problems #2, #5, and #7 have particular relevance to this topic.

The Collaborative Innovation

If the problem just listed were to be solved, cooperating teachers needed to have meaningful input into the structure and design of the total program. In addition, cooperating teachers represented a valuable, and not fully tapped, resource. To be most useful, cooperating teachers had to be given an extended and more vital role in the student teaching program. When a student teacher was placed with an excellent cooperating teacher, that student teacher could benefit directly from the teacher's particular talent. However, in most cases, the benefit of these talents was restricted to the one student teacher fortunate enough to be placed with the particular cooperating teacher. Little effort was made to bring talented cooperating teachers into contact positions with large numbers of student teachers. A better way, it seemed, was to permit all the student teachers to come into contact with this cooperating teacher. If the cooperating teacher were given a large audience, seemingly more student teachers could benefit. As a result of these beliefs, a program

was designed to include opportunities for student teachers to come into contact with fourteen different cooperating teachers each of whom would present something that worked particularly well for them as a classroom teacher and would discuss issues and problems of importance in the teaching of social studies.

Quite simply, the normal university teacher education program would not do. In order to allow the increased participation of cooperating teachers, it was necessary to build an entirely new teacher education program. Using the input of many cooperating teachers, a new program was designed. Figure 1 shows a comparison of the new program design (henceforth called the Integrated Program) and the old program design.

As shown in Figure 1 (B) (p.5), in the new program, students were given two student teaching rounds (one each in the junior and senior high schools) of four-weeks duration each. The only university-based course that the students took during the term was Ed. C.I. 360/361 (Curriculum and Instruction in Secondary Social Studies). Essentially, the student took fifteen hours of in-class instruction per week for the first four weeks of the term. After four weeks of methods instruction student teaching began. Since student teachers were in the schools for the entire day, no in-class (at the University) courses were held. Once a week, for approximately three hours per night, the student teachers came back (hence the coining of the term "Comeback Sessions") to the university to attend a seminar conducted by a team of two cooperating teachers. [These time blocks are shown ▨ in Figure 1 (B)]. After

FIGURE 1

A) OLD PROGRAM DESIGN

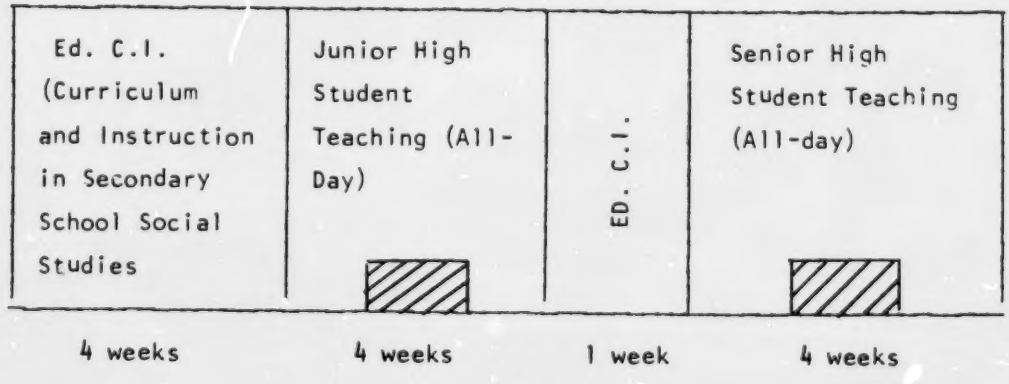
13 weeks

Morning	UNIVERSITY COURSE #1
	UNIVERSITY COURSE #2
	UNIVERSITY COURSE #3
	UNIVERSITY COURSE #4 (Curriculum and Instruction in Secondary School Social Studies)
Afternoon	5 week afternoon student teaching round

In the old program, students typically took four regular university courses in the morning for the full thirteen-week term. During the afternoons they would have no classes except that, for a five-week block, they would student teach in the afternoon.

B) NEW PROGRAM DESIGN

13 weeks



four weeks of all-day student teaching, Round I ended. The student teachers again attended fifteen hours of in-university C.I. courses during the day. After this week of intersession, another four-week round of all-day student teachers came back to the university once per week for a three-hour seminar experience led by a team of two cooperating teachers. After this Round II, the student teaching experience was completed.

The Comeback Sessions

The Comeback Sessions, along with the rest of the program revisions, began in September, 1977. Collaboration was sought from cooperating teachers in the form of conducting one of the sessions. Many cooperating teachers were anxious to participate.

A list of the topics discussed at the first series of Comeback Sessions is shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2

Sessions	Teachers	Topics
A	1	World War 1, concepts
	2	Regional Disparity, sources
B	3	Liberties, unit planning
	4	Third World, simulation
C	5	Renaissance, change model
	6	Consumer education, skills
D	7	Liberties, discussion skills
	8	Geography, skill development
E	9	Unit Planning, lesson planning
	10	Moral Stages, development
F	11	Novel in social studies
	12	Africa, skill development
G	13	Psychology, mastery techniques
	14	Discussion techniques, inquiry model

The typical comeback session followed this general format:

4:30 - 5:15	First teacher presented and discussed information on handout. Specific questions were answered and points expanded.
5:15 - 5:30	Break
5:30 - 6:15	Second teacher presented and discussed information on handout. Specific questions were answered and points expanded.
6:15 - 6:45	Both teachers were left open to any topic or problem on which student teachers wanted advice or input from a seasoned source. At times, this time was called "teacher on the spot". Often this session lasted well past 6:45.
7:00 - ?*	Many teachers met informally with student teachers over coffee or beer to discuss additional problems or continue discussion. (This informal session was most valuable).

Implementing The Collaborative Innovation

The decision was made to implement the total program in November 1976 after discussions with Dr. W.H. Worth (Dean of the Faculty of Education). The crucial factor was the transfer of money from payments of sessionals or another source to provide funding for the payment of Comeback Session teachers. Dr. Worth provided, after the submission of a carefully planned budget, a grant from the Trust Fund for Projects on Innovation in Teacher Education. The proposed budget was $3000 per term or $6000 per year. This budget was accepted by Dr. Worth and this institutional-departmental decision, then, provided the impetus to proceed with revising the total program.

The Trust Fund for Projects on Innovations in Teacher Education provided funding up to $6000 per year -- $3000 per term. Cooperating teachers were paid $50 per session with $20 sundries -- total payment

* Many discussions continued well into the night and comeback session leaders and student teachers sometimes went to a lounge to continue their discussions.

generally amounted to $120 per week since comeback session teachers generally instructed two classes per week in 1977-78. This payment to cooperating teachers did not represent completely additional money since money would have had to been expended for sessional staffing. In addition, the program spent only $3200 during the first year. In subsequent years the cost has been even less, under $2000 per year.*

Since the initial grant was given in late November 1976, changes have occurred in the source funding the total project. An additional general practicum grant was made by the government of Alberta to the teacher-training institutions in Alberta; the funding for payment of comeback session teachers continues through this practicum grant.

Change Analysis

When the total program change began, it was apparent that, more than any other item, classroom teachers had to be willing to volunteer their services as cooperating teachers and instructors of the Comeback Sessions. The year prior to the implementation of this integrated professional term, only 1/3 of the needed classroom teachers volunteered to serve as cooperating teachers. Without support from classroom teachers in terms of adequate placements and comeback session teachers, the integrated professional term could not have been implemented.

Several strategies were used to attempt to gather more support from cooperating teachers.

1. Communication networks were widened through use of information letters from university personnel in social studies to classroom cooperating teachers.

2. Informal and formal discussions were held with groups of senior high school social studies department chairmen and at junior high coordinator meetings.

* Mainly there are two reasons for this reduction. We found that it was better to have a single Comeback Session instructor rather than two and with lower enrollments we cut from two sessions to one session per week.

3. Informal discussions were held at several of the schools in-service days.

4. Informal visits were made to many schools to speak with teachers, department heads, and principals.

5. In early September, 1977, a letter was sent to each secondary social studies teacher in Edmonton explaining the new program and asking for volunteers to serve as cooperating teachers and as instructors for the comeback sessions. These volunteers were carefully selected for the first series of comeback sessions.

6. The supervisors of Social Studies for both major school systems were involved in planning and recruitment.

7. A systematic attempt was made to recruit cooperating teachers in non-urban areas. (Now more than 50% of the student teachers do at least one student teaching round outside of Edmonton.)

8. Cooperating teachers and faculty consultants were invited to a series of supper meetings at the university with the purpose of building working relationships and facilitating three-way communication.

One problem not anticipated was the content and teaching style of the teachers chosen to teach the "comeback sessions". A common complaint that cooperating teachers had made was that when student teachers arrived in their classes, they were not ready to assume teaching because they lacked practical knowledge. The curriculum and instruction courses, many cooperating teachers stated, had in the past been too theoretical and not practical enough. While cooperating teachers agreed that their purpose should be to present ultimately practical material, in a few cases cooperating teachers presented materials of a heavily theoretical nature. According to evaluations, student teachers did not react positively to overly theoretical presentations by cooperating teachers.

Evaluation of the Collaborative Innovation

Extensive formal and informal evaluations have been conducted on the use of cooperating teachers as Comeback Session Instructors. Both

formal and informal evaluations have been positive. Some of the informal assessments suggest that both forces for and against the change are present. These forces include:

FORCES FOR CHANGE	FORCES AGAINST CHANGE
1. Interest and abilities of cooperating teachers to take part in the program.	1. Student teachers feel that after a full day of student teaching, attending a three-hour seminar is too demanding.
2. Interest and needs of the student teachers.	2. Lack of planning time by university personnel.
3. Positive evaluations from student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university personnel.	
4. Low cost of involvement.	
5. The positive relationships built between the university and the cooperating teachers.	
6. The inclusion of this collaborative effort into the framework of a larger program that seems to be working well.	

In the "Conclusions and Recommendations" of a formal evaluation undertaken by the office of field services (March, 1979) titled Evaluation Report: Integrated Secondary Social Studies Practicum Program (p.22), the "Comeback Sessions" were evaluated as

> "generally very well received, and were seen as having a considerable impact on student's growth as teachers. This innovation would seem to have merit, and should be continued."

Questionnaire responses by student teachers reported the following:

*48. Overall, I would rate the comeback sessions as:

1. very poor (2.5%)
2. inadequate (6.3%)

3. satisfactory (35.4%)
4. very good (34.2%)
5. excellent (16.5%)

*49. The impact that the comeback sessions had on my growth as a teacher was:

very little	1	2	3	4	5	a great deal
	3.8%	7.6%	30.4%	45.0%	8.9%	

The use of cooperating teachers in collective instruction of student teachers would seem to show great promise. Such large group instruction provides for more meaningful involvement by cooperating teachers and allows student teachers to learn from a large number of excellent cooperating teachers without sacrificing the more intensive experience of working directly with one cooperating teacher for an extended period of time. Indeed, student teachers have, as an added benefit, compiled files of the "best" material of excellent teachers.

We plan to continue the program. The response of all those involved has been positive. Making fuller use of talented, largely untapped cooperating teachers has been a great benefit to the teacher-training program at The University of Alberta.

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* From Evaluation Report: Integrated Secondary Social Studies Practicum Program, 1977-78. Prepared by: Field Services, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, March, 1979, p.33.